NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0024 JANUARY 23, 1976
EDWARD CONLEY

AMERICA'S MISSING MEN IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

ANNCR:

PRESIDENT FORD HAS DESIGNATED JANUARY TWENTY-FIFTH AS A NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR AMERICANS MISSING IN ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. VOA'S EDWARD CONLEY HAS THESE THOUGHTS:

TEXT:

MORE THAN EIGHT HUNDRED AMERICANS ARE LISTED AS MISSING IN ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA...CASUALTIES OF THE VIETNAM WAR. ANOTHER ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED ARE COUNTED AS DEAD...BUT THE LOCATIONS OF THEIR REMAINS ARE UNKNOWN. THOSE FACTS, AS PRESIDENT FORD POINTED OUT A FEW DAYS AGO, CAST "A CRUEL SHADOW OF DOUBT OVER HUNDREDS OF AMERICAN FAMILIES WHO HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF THEIR LOVED ONES."

WHEN THE PARIS VIETNAM AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED THREE YEARS AGO IT CONTAINED SPECIFIC PROVISIONS CALLING FOR AN ACCOUNTING OF ALL MISSING AMERICANS. BUT SO FAR, THAT HASN'T BEEN DONE. PRIOR TO THE FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAM, JOINT MILITARY TEAMS ESTABLISHED UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT TO SEARCH FOR MISSING OR DEAD COMBATANTS MADE LITTLE PROGRESS DUE TO A LACK OF COMMUNIST COOPERATION. AND, AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON, HANOI INITIALLY INSISTED ON LINKING UNITED STATES RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE FOR NORTH VIETNAM TO ANY NEW INFORMATION ON MISSING AMERICANS...SOMETHING THE U.S. COULD NOT ACCEPT.

NOW, IT APPEARS THERE COULD BE SOME RELAXATION OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE POSITION WHICH WOULD NOT ONLY EASE THE MINDS OF MANY AMERICANS, BUT COULD EVENTUALLY LEAD TO IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND COMMUNIST VIETNAM.

LAST MONTH, THE REMAINS OF THREE AMERICAN AIRMEN SHOT DOWN OVER NORTH VIETNAM WERE RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES...THIS AFTER TALKS BETWEEN NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS OF A SPECIAL U.S. CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE. THE CONGRESSMEN RETURNED TO WASHINGTON REPORTING THAT VIETNAM WANTS TO REESTABLISH NORMAL AND EVEN FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. RECENTLY, ALSO, SENATOR GEORGE MCGOVERN TRAVELED TO SAIGON AND HANOI. RETURNING TO WASHINGTON, HE SAID VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS APPEAR EAGER TO OPEN RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. SENATOR MCGOVERN ADDED IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THE VIETNAMESE DID NOT MAKE UNITED STATES RECONSTRUCTION AID A CONDITION TO ESTABLISHING RELATIONS.

IN HIS PROCLAMATION DECLARING JANUARY TWENTY-FIFTH A DAY OF PRAYER FOR AMERICANS MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, PRESIDENT FORD NOTED THE SUCCESS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE IN OBTAINING THE RETURN OF THREE MISSING AMERICANS. HE ADDED THAT HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA "BROUGHT FORTH SOME HOPE FOR PROGRESS IN THE MATTER." THE PRESIDENT ADDED THAT THE UNITED STATES IS UNALTERABLY COMMITTED TO SEEK THE FULLEST POSSIBLE ACCOUNTING FOR THOSE LOST IN COMBAT.

MISTER FORD HAS STATED IN HIS NEW PACIFIC DOCTRINE THAT WASHINGTON STANDS PREPARED TO RECIPROCATE GESTURES OF GOOD WILL BY THE NEW INDOCHINA COMMUNIST REGIMES---PARTICULARLY THE RETURN OF THE REMAINS OF AMERICANS KILLED OR MISSING IN ACTION, OR INFORMATION ABOUT THEM. U.S. POLICIES TOWARD THOSE COUNTRIES, HE SAID, WILL BE DETERMINED BY THEIR CONDUCT TOWARD THE UNITED STATES.

AS SENATOR MCGOVERN POINTED OUT THIS WEEK, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT MOVES TOWARD U.S.-VIETNAM RELATIONS WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE, WITH VIETNAMESE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL AND THE UNITED STATES ITSELF INVOLVED IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR. BUT WITHIN THAT TIME SPAN, THERE WILL BE AMPLE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE LEADERS IN HANOI AND SAIGON TO SHOW FURTHER SIGNS OF COOPERATION IN THE SEARCH FOR MISSING AMERICANS.

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